



# Viking and Norse Settlers and Their Lasting Impact on Iceland and Its People

## Abstract

The purpose of this research was to investigate the lasting impacts that the Norse and Viking settlers had on Iceland's environment and people. Through an extensive preliminary literature review and research process, I learned that Viking settlers colonized Iceland quickly in their hunt for resources. The settlers ravaged the land of its natural birch forests, using the wood for various necessities. This rapid deforestation contributed to current issues Iceland has had with soil erosion and lack of forest growth (Luft, 2001).

While in Iceland, I kept a field journal to record my observations and notes, as well as conduct an interview on the various ways Vikings have left their mark on Iceland. I attended the Soil Conservation Service of Iceland to learn more about what Iceland is doing to reverse the effects of soil erosion and to gather more information about the Vikings' role in the changing environment. I found that the Viking settlers' deforestation of Iceland was the tipping point for the environment. Without the birch forests and other plants, the soil became loose and vulnerable to the strong winds of Iceland (Catlin, 2016). Despite the Vikings' role in the environment, I observed that Icelanders are very proud of their heritage.

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## Methodology

Using the method of Triangulation, three different methods of gathering information were used to answer the research question:

- An Interview with Iceland Tour Guide
- Personal Observations
- Previously Collected Facts & Data

### Photo 1 - Right

One of the few patches of birch forest I witnessed in our drive through Iceland.



### Photo 2 - Left

The typical flora in Iceland usually consists of grass and low bushes.



## Findings

### *The Environment*

- The rapid colonization of Iceland by Viking settlers.
- Early settlers stripped Iceland of almost all natural birch forests for wood resources and farming/grazing fields.
- Imported livestock put pressure on the soil and growth of flora.
- Without forests, soil became loose and susceptible to erosion.
- Icelandic soil partly consists of volcanic ash which is prone to erosion

### *Culture*

- Icelanders are very proud of their Viking ancestry.
- DNA of Icelanders is split 50/50 between Norse (Viking) and Irish.
- Many Viking references in everyday culture.
- Still base justice system on Viking ideals.
- Icelandic language is practically identical to the language spoken by the Vikings.

## Conclusion

Iceland and its people still bare the scars and marks that the ancient Viking Settlers left. Modern Icelanders are struggling to conserve their nutrient rich soil from erosion and regrow their birch forests. Even though these amazing people are still dealing with the impacts of their ancestors' choices, one can see that they embrace their Viking heritage fully. While on the surface there are plenty of references to the Vikings throughout their culture, the connection goes deeper than what meets the eye.



### Photo 3

Viking legend Leif Erikson proudly immortalized in front of the famous Hallgrímskirkja in Reykjavik, Iceland.

## References

- Interview with Baldur Gylfason
- Soil Conservation Service of Iceland (SCSI)
- Luft, E. (2001). *The Discovery and Settlement of Iceland*. Retrieved January 29, 2018 from <http://go.galegroup.com.ezproxy.libproxy.db.erau.edu/ps/i.d.o?p=GVRL&u=embry&id=GALE|CX3408500474&v=2.1&it=r&sid=summon&authCount=1>
- Catlin, K. (2016, September). *Archaeology for the Anthropocene: Scale, soil, and the settlement of Iceland*. Retrieved January 29, 2018 from <https://www.sciencedirect.com.ezproxy.libproxy.db.erau.edu/science/article/pii/S221330541530028X?via%3Dihub>

### Photo 4

This ship, named the Icelfar, is accurate to Viking age long boat on display at Viking World.

